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SUBJECT: TOWARD MEANINGFUL REHABILITATION: HATTIEVILLE PRISON IN
BELIZE

¶1. (U) Summary. Hattieville Prison (also known as Belize Central Prison and the Kolbe Foundation) is Belize's only prison. With an inmate population of approximately 1,470--including men, women and youth, the prison provides on-site medical care, dental care via referrals, and mental health assessments by a visiting psychologist. Operated by a non-governmental organization with the goal of maintaining a facility geared toward meaningful rehabilitation and the successful re-integration of inmates into society, the prison is at near-capacity and has multiple housing facilities, educational and vocational courses and three rehabilitation programs that rival any other services of their kind available in Belize. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Background. Management of the Hattieville Prison, located at Mile 2.5 on the Burrell Boom Highway was taken over by the Kolbe Foundation in 2002. Kolbe Foundation is a private, non-governmental organization established by members of the Rotary Club of Belize. The organization is named after Maximilian Kolbe, the World War II Catholic priest who became the patron saint of prisoners, because he gave up his life to save another prisoner. Its mission is to make the prison a secure, humane facility geared towards meaningful rehabilitation. To that end the prison has developed many programs in support of the successful re-entry of prisoners into society when they are released.

¶3. (U) Finances. Hattieville Prison's current funding from the Government of Belize is a BZ\$13 (US\$6.50) daily-reimbursement per prisoner, a total of approximately BZ\$6,975,000 (USD 3,487,000) each year. However, some programs (especially the rehabilitation and youth programs) receive additional funding from independent sources, interalia, Michael Ashcroft, a wealthy British businessman with interests in Belize, and the Wagner Foundation.

¶3. (U) Facilities. Hattieville prison includes seven (7) minimum security buildings, maximum and medium security areas, a "supermax" section for inmates who pose a high security risk, a women's building, the Ashcroft Rehabilitation Center and the Wagner Youth Facility. The prison also includes a school building used for education and meetings, exercise areas, basketball courts, a cafeteria, agricultural and poultry training farms, on-site staff housing, administrative buildings, and a man-made lagoon with fish.

¶4. (U) Construction. Buildings are quite rustic, and usually bare concrete. Cells generally contain 2-4 beds (2 bunk beds) per room and a sink. Often cells have a window, and the doors are usually kept open-except in high security areas. Buildings are usually only two stories in height and have long hallways. Many of the buildings are separated by iron fences and have narrow entry ways.

¶5. (U) In-Processing. Upon entering the system, new inmates go through an intake procedure and are assigned to their area of Hattieville prison based on a security assessment and their status in the legal system. Prisoners who are remanded until their trial are generally placed in a specific area of the prison--as are women (who go to a special women's section) and youth (who are placed at the Wagner Foundation for Youth). U.S. citizens and other foreign

nationals, who are at Hattieville due to immigration violations, are often placed together in a section.

¶16. (U) Population. Hattieville Prison has approximately 1,470 inmates at present, counting men, women and youth. Women make up only 2.6 percent (a total of 38 inmates). An additional 3.1 percent (45 total) are juvenile prisoners between the ages of 12-18. The prison is currently designed for 1,500 inmates. A new building set to open in 2009 will increase its capacity to 1,700.

¶17. (U) Americans. There are usually no more than ten (10) AmCits within the prison system at any one time, with three to four of them being held for immigration violations. Immigration violations typically result in a fine levied or a 6-month stay in prison, with an order to leave the country issued after either payment of the fine is made or the jail term is completed.

a. Some AmCits have not been charged but are in remand until arrangements can be made for them to leave the country. This might include prisoners with a mental disability. Other AmCits have been charged and served their time, but are in prison beyond 6 months due to challenges with their repatriation to the U.S. and remain at Hattieville with an order of removal status. This allows prison officials to legally have the inmate in their care until their repatriation can be arranged.

b. Other AmCits are serving longer prison terms for more serious crimes. This might include rape, murder, weapons/ammunition violations, or arson. These AmCits are usually housed with the general population of the prison within the medium and super-max areas, as needed.

¶18. (U) Staff. There are approximately 265 staff at the prison, currently--70 civilian and 195 uniformed. Additionally, there are prison volunteers, including three chaplains. Most staff work 12-hour shifts day and night, while a small group works a normal 8-hour day shift. Generally, staff work in full-week rotations, working seven days on and getting seven days off. Security staff currently make approximately USD 500 monthly, have life insurance, and can use the prison clinic for health care. The Belize Institute of Management in Belize City is one of the main training resources for staff.

¶19. (U) Prisoner Health Care. According to Hattieville prison administrators, prisoners have a range of health care provided to them, either through direct, on-site care or via referrals to providers in Belize City.

a. The prison has an on-site, full-time doctor and two additional medical staff. Prisoners can request a visit to the clinic and have only a short waiting time for an appointment.

b. Depending on the severity of the health need, prisoners may also be transferred to Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital, Belize's largest public hospital, for care that may include x-rays or more complicated blood tests. Prisoners are also taken to Belize City for dental care.

c. There are monthly mental health assessments by a visiting psychologist. Currently, the prison has approximately 60 mentally-challenged inmates. Prison administrators feel the services they provide are better than what is available in most hospitals in Belize.

d. Unfortunately resource constraints limit health care that can be provided, whether it is preventative or acute care. One example of a limitation is that HIV testing is not mandatory because of cost. While the national prevalence of HIV is estimated at two percent, prison administrators there is estimate an average of 4-5 percent within the prison population. Currently, prisoners with HIV live side-by-side with sero-negative members of the general population of the prison. All inmates with HIV receive anti-retroviral therapies. Related to HIV, the prevalence of TB among inmates is a cause for concern for prison administrators.

¶10. (U) Vocational Training. Prisoners can gain vocational experience by joining programs that include training in woodwork,

jewelry-making, welding, cement-block forming, and farming. A gift shop just outside the prison sells some of the items made by inmates. A part of the proceeds is used for prison expenses, and part is passed back to the prisoners. Through their work and through funds provided by family and friends, inmates are allowed to have a "cash account" from which they can withdraw funds on a limited basis each week. The prison hopes in the future to move to a cash card system for managing inmate finances.

¶11. (U) Rehabilitation Services. Currently, Hattieville is the only major institution in Belize to provide rehabilitation services.

a. This service includes Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous 90-day programs. The programs started in 2006, have a maximum capacity of 100 participants for each cycle, and are taught by ex-prisoners and ex-addicts--who also serve as peer counselors. The rehabilitation programs are behavior-based and are for inmates with any type of general addiction. Inmates enter voluntarily, with the knowledge that their participation improves their chances for approval of parole. The programs include basic education, peer group activities, testimonials, detoxification diets, separate (on-site) program housing, vocational training, computer classes, and other activities. Inmates who complete the program may be released depending on their circumstances or placed in special post-program housing which includes aftercare support meetings and activities. Additionally, family members are sensitized regarding recovery issues and the support they can provide to their enrolled family. The programs also accept civilian participants, who agree to be admitted into the prison and become a part of the population.

b. The prison has a Christian-based, volunteer-run Narcotics Anonymous and Emotional Abuse Anonymous program. Inner Change for Freedom Belize (IFFB) is an 18-month rehabilitation course that was first offered in 2003 and graduates a smaller cadre each year. Like the other programs, IFFB includes rigorous scheduling, program-specific housing, academic training, physical exercise, and support groups.

¶12. (U) Recidivism Rates. Prison administrators estimate that among those who have been convicted, there is a general 20-25 percent (Note: a more precise figure was not available. End note.) recidivism rate - often for parole violation or another commission of crime. Inmates who have gone through the rehabilitation programs and released are invited to participate in support groups that have been established outside of the prison community. Among

rehabilitation participants, the recidivism rate is estimated to be 17 percent.

¶13. (U) Embassy Cooperation. Prison officials have held ongoing meetings with staff of the Consular section from the U.S. Embassy. While many of the meetings have been informal, some of the latest have included representatives from either the Embassy Consular, Political or Security sections, Embassy Belmopan Front Office, Belize Immigration, and prison security and administration. The outcomes of the meetings have included mutual agreements that will benefit not only the U.S. Embassy, but other embassies with their citizens represented in the prison population. Some of the clarification of rules/procedures include: visiting and telephone usage hours expanded for embassy staff who are working with their citizens, monthly reports sent to the embassy by the prison providing current data on the citizens who are incarcerated, some prisoner access to the Internet if this access will help facilitate the inmate's release from prison, the allowance of toiletries and some limited food items provided by the embassy to inmates, and specific inmate update meetings held with prison administration upon request. Both prison and immigration officials have expressed enthusiasm with regard to improved working relationships and communication with staff at the U.S. Embassy.

¶14. (U) Communications. Communication is a definite challenge throughout prison facilities. Inmates normally have no access to the Internet and few office areas have Internet access for staff. Often the prison staff use their personal email accounts for work.

¶15. (U) Reception. The front reception area is incredibly busy with "gatekeeper staff" who act as receptionists, security, drug, and paraphernalia screeners, and administrators. There are only two

telephone lines available for the majority of calls made into the prison. This results in frequent busy signals when the public (including Embassy staff) telephone the prison. Additionally once prison staff takes a call, they may not be able to transfer it because of lack of telephone connections to most buildings and lack of an inmate database. The limitations on telephone calls are mirrored when calling to the outside. Inmates must pay for their own calls, arrange calls by asking for favors, or resort to attempting to make collect calls through the operator. Oddly enough, the prison does have a public address system, which is used as a radio station broadcast to provide music throughout the facility and send public announcements.

¶16. (U) Information Interchange. Sharing of information remains a challenge among local police stations, immigration offices, the U.S. Embassy and Hattievile prison. Although improvements have been made, it may take more than 24 hours before the Embassy hears about an arrest. On some occasions, an AmCit will be processed by a local police station and transferred to Hattievile before the Embassy is aware of them being in the system. Sometimes, the Embassy is not notified of arrests until the day the citizen must appear in court. Similarly, AmCits have been released from Hattievile or local police stations without the knowledge of the Embassy. Occasionally, Immigration has come to Hattievile prison to pick up an AmCit for deportation without first notifying prison administrators; and although motivated by concerns, the prison's policy of not notifying a prisoner of his/her exit date until the day of departure makes coordination awkward.

¶17. (U) Prisoner Documents and Belongings. An important item discussed in numerous meetings between Embassy and prison officials is the security and tracking of an inmate's belongings. It is common for a passport, driver's license, or birth certificate to end up missing or to be misplaced for a time.

a. There is some question regarding the safety of general belongings, as well as credit and/or debit cards, and cash. The problem occurs particularly when an inmate is transferred from office to office within the incarceration system -- i.e., between various police stations, immigration lock-up, and Hattievile prison. The transfer of a prisoner may occur in response to their need to face several charges in different jurisdictions or to attend court. Everyone who discusses this matter agrees that once an inmate is transferred and separated from his/her belongings, problems will surely begin. Discussions are still ongoing with regard to putting in place a system whereby belongings (in particular IDs/documents) can safely follow along when an inmate is transferred or be delivered to/picked up by the Embassy. Hattievile prison administrators are confident they have a safe and secure system to protect prisoner documents and belongings. However currently, not all prisoners who arrive at Hattievile have all of their items with them.

b. In a few cases, assistance to AmCits has been delayed while police or immigration officials look for the inmate's passport or original birth certificate. In one case a released AmCit almost missed his flight because his passport was locked away for safe

keeping, and the officer in charge had left with the key. In another case, an officer had taken an inmate's belongings home for safe keeping and had to go home to retrieve them.

¶18. (U) Prisoners with Mental Health Issues. While Rockview Mental Health Center in Rockville was an option for care for AmCits with mental health issues, the new Palmview Center (in Belmopan), has replaced it as a long-term care facility. It was unfortunately already filled to capacity before it was even opened. With the limited resources of the smaller mental health clinics and hospital wards throughout the country, this leaves Hattievile prison as the remaining option for AmCits with mental health issues. Although the physical surroundings are more secure and better than at Rockview Mental Health Center, the inclusion of U.S. citizens with mental health issues as part of the inmate system does present problems. One issue is that not all prison guards have training equal to the standards of care that would be provided by mental health psychiatric nurses who staffed Rockview when it was open. Similarly inmates with mental health issues are not separated but mixed-in with populations who may not have patience or knowledge of how to

interact with persons with mental health disabilities. Additionally, mental health assessments or care at the prison can happen only through a special referral or during the once-a-month visit of the psychologist who is assigned to the area by the Government of Belize.

¶19. (U) Nutrition and Other Needs. While administrators state inmates are provided with three meals daily, many prisoners complain about the food; and almost all AmCit prisoners lose a fair amount of weight while they are incarcerated. Often, AmCit mention the need for fruits and vegetables, more meat, and various toiletries and paper goods. When appropriate, the Embassy provides small items to the prisoners-with the support of prison officials. These items include toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, shampoo and conditioner, pens, pads of paper, and breakfast bars. The Embassy has also provided razors and bug spray--both distributed and monitored by prison staff, as needed.

¶20. (U) FUTURE PLANS FOR HATTIEVILLE PRISON. The prison staff is quite enthusiastic about their plans to strengthen the prison's rehabilitation programming. Their main goal is to assist inmates with their re-entry into society and ensure they have the opportunity to gain skilled employment. To this end, prison administration seeks to broaden vocational programming to include seven core trades: mechanic, electrical, plumbing, woodwork, welding, agriculture, and horticulture. They also seek to add more literacy training.

¶21. (U) Additionally, prison administrators hope to add more job skills training for staff and would like to raise the level of security training, as well as provide better equipment to civilian staff and security officers.

¶22. (U) Construction continues on new buildings for medium security, as well as new exercise areas. Additionally, prison officials would like to improve the financial state of the prison.

¶23. (U) The prison's website is www.kolbe.net. POC at post is David M. Jones, tel. 011-501-822-4011, extension 4219, email jonesdm@state.gov.

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